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probably disappoint both parties, those who approve and those who disapprove its principles. A Missouri Compromise restriction of slavery, under the authority of Congress, is little likely to be again enacted, or to be asked or desired by any portion of the people; and as little before as since this decision. Slaveholders will not be apt to trust their slaves, voluntarily, in the free States, where no law can restrain their departure for an hour, or reclaim them when they depart, from any expectation they may indulge of holding them again in slavery when they get them back. Such States as may choose to invest their free colored inhabitants with any or all of the rights of citizenship, will not be likely to desist therefrom, on account of any of the considerations presented by the court in this case. Thus, but for its effect on the character of the court, the world will probably move on very much as it did before. The country will feel the consequences of the decision more deeply and more permanently, in the loss of confidence in the sound judicial integrity and strictly legal character of their tribunals, than in anything beside; and this perhaps may well be accounted the greatest political calamity which this country, under our forms of government, could sustain.

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- ART. V. — 1. *Poems by ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.* New York: C. S. Francis & Co. 1857. 3 vols. 32mo. (Blue and gold.) pp. 378, 385, 354.
2. *Poems by ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.* New York: C. S. Francis & Co. 1857. 3 vols. 16mo. pp. 396, 434, 366.

MRS. BROWNING is sometimes spoken of as ranking among the first female poets. To many this would not seem great commendation. There is much in the education of women, in the present state of society, that unfits them for the highest success in literature, or in any of the creative arts. It is not impossible that there is something also in their very nature,

which would tend to produce the same result. There is perhaps no more general distinction between the mind of man and that of woman, than that, where the former requires something to mediate between itself and the object of its contemplation, the latter approaches this object directly, without any such mediation. Thus, while man requires that his religion rest upon a solid basis of argument and philosophy, that of woman is more often the immediate apprehension of a loving faith. In the same manner, in the ordinary concerns of life, her instinct leads her safely through intricacies where the cooler and more reflecting judgment of man would be at fault. The same tendency not unfrequently makes itself felt in her artistic creations. The work of the artist is to free himself from the direct influence of the objects about him. He is to represent them, not as they are, but as they seem. We go into the forest; the moss is soft beneath our feet; the cool stream and the shaded bank invite us to refreshing rest; we find it difficult to conceive of all these objects as existing for the eye alone; but the artist—the painter, for instance—must so regard them. Before they can be transferred to his canvas, they must be to him transmuted into color only. This effect is sometimes produced in the case of those of us who are not artists, after we have been contemplating a gallery of paintings. We go out into the world, and all things assume a picturesque aspect to us; the colors separate themselves from the material to which they are attached, and the world seems to exist for us in appearance merely. Goethe has remarked the same tendency. He tells us that, after he had been studying the works of Ostade in the gallery at Dresden, he used to go into the shop of the cobbler, with whom, from some freak of fancy, he was lodging, and he could hardly believe, sometimes, that he was not gazing upon another painting; all things exhibiting to him the effects of light and shade peculiar to that master.

But not only is it required by the highest art that outward objects shall not be exhibited in their direct connection with ourselves; the feelings also must be represented as something without the mind, which can be contemplated by it. The direct utterance of a feeling is not poetry, or at least not the

highest; just as a cry, whether of joy or of sorrow, is not music. Thus the artist must hold himself aloof, in some degree, from the objects by which he is surrounded. Like the mystic lady of Shalott, he weaves into his web scenes that he sees reflected in the magic mirror of his fancy; but when he becomes weary of this seclusion, and will take part in that which was before a varied play of forms and colors, the charm is broken. The artist must feel deeply; but he must not be under the dominion of his feelings.

The tendency in woman, of which we have spoken, as inclining her to approach without mediation the object of her thoughts, is not favorable to this artistic freedom. Her affections and emotions are more powerful than those of man, and can thus be less easily untwined from the objects to which they cling. Her poetry is therefore very often only the direct utterance, in a measured form, of those feelings which are so sweet or touching when breathed into the ear of one, but which lose their greatest charm when uttered to the world. Thus Mrs. Hemans and L. E. L. brood over their sorrows with plaintive song, as

“Over his own sweet note the stock-dove broods.”

We would not have the remarks that have been made taken in too general a sense. The very element in the female mind which renders it more difficult for woman to take a high rank as a creative artist, would, if overcome, become a help instead of a hinderance. The intellect which would analyze all things, which would mediate all things, is very hostile to the genius of poetry, or of art. The artist takes things as they are, or rather as they appear to be. So far as anything is beautiful, it exists for itself, and not merely through and for another. Thus, if this very directness, this independence of all mediation, which has been spoken of as one great peculiarity of the female mind, could be so far overcome as to render the mind free from outward objects, and even from the too powerful dominion of its own emotions, it would contribute much to produce that simple and *naïve* manner of representation, which is so charming in the earlier poets. This, of course, must be to a great degree the work of education.

One shut out from contact with the actual world, excepting when it is glittering in its festal garments, or as it is depicted in the romance, cannot represent it in its truth. The only true world such a one has known, is that of his own breast, and even that has not been laid open to him in its fullest depths. Schiller tells us, in regard to one of his earlier works, that the defect was, that he tried to paint men years before he had seen one. Such is the case with many of our female writers. For their material they have their own feelings, the deepest of which have perhaps never been aroused; they have the world of romance, and of polite society; and they have their own ideals of good and evil. These last they draw upon most gladly. The fault is, however, that, while they are depicting their ideal hero, they are too apt, like Miss Porter, to fall in love with him, and after that the reader and the other characters have little to hope for.

It is not our intention to multiply examples in which the reverse of all this is true. The novels of Mrs. Stowe, which are in the hands of all, and which, while they have no claims to anything like artistic unity, yet display a power of conceiving and representing characters which would do credit to our first novelists, at once suggest themselves. The poems of Mrs. Browning furnish an example of the same kind. Her place is not merely in the front rank of our female poets, but of our poets. When we think of the first living British poets, the names that occur to us are those of Tennyson and the Brownings, and we should not know where to seek a fourth to place beside them. In considering, then, the poems of Mrs. Browning, we shall not be content with the praise,

“ Which men give women when they judge of work
Not as mere work, but as mere women’s work,
Expressing the comparative respect,
Which means the absolute scorn.”

Mrs. Browning’s strength requires us to speak of her freely and sincerely.

When we transfer Mrs. Browning from the ranks of the female poets to those of the poets of England, we would not be understood to separate her from the first class. Mrs. Browning’s poems are, in all respects, the utterances of a

woman, — of a woman of great learning, rich experience, and powerful genius, uniting to her woman's nature the strength which is sometimes thought peculiar to man. She is like the Amazon in the midst of battle, hiding not her sex, but demanding no favor for her beardless lip.

The fact that Mrs. Browning has attained to such a height of poetic excellence, not in spite of her woman's nature, but by means of it, shows that the difference which has been hitherto supposed to exist between poets and poetesses is not, so far as relates to the matter of power, founded upon the nature of things. It explains also, in some degree, the ardor of admiration with which she is regarded by many of the most cultivated of her sex. She speaks what is struggling for utterance in their own hearts, and they find in her poems the revelation of themselves.

In considering the poems of Mrs. Browning, we shall first examine their outward form and expression; afterward, their *content*, that which is expressed; and, finally, we shall study them as a whole, made up of these two elements.

There are few poets who have greater power of expression than Mrs. Browning. By the side, however, of much that is strong and beautiful, there is much that is harsh and forced. Her meaning is often obscure, and her verses unfinished. Her occasional lack of clearness has kept her works closed to many, who would otherwise have received much enjoyment from them. This harshness and lack of finish are most strongly marked in her earlier poems. As an example, we will take a verse from the poem of "The Lost Bower."

"If it *were* a bird! — ah, sceptic,
Give me 'Yea' or give me 'Nay,' —
Though my soul were nympholeptic,
As I heard that virêlay,

You may stoop your pride to pardon, for my sin is far away."

This occurs directly by the side of the following perfect picture from Nature: —

"Never blackbirds, never thrushes,
Nor small finches sing as sweet,
When the sun strikes through the bushes,
To their crimson clinging feet,
And their pretty eyes look sideways to the summer heavens complete."

Even in this last stanza, however, doubt might arise as to the force of the word "complete."

The following stanzas show much power; but the effect is injured by the manner in which they run together.

"Lucretius — nobler than his mood!
Who dropped his plummet down the broad
Deep universe, and said, 'No God,'

"Finding no bottom! he denied
Divinely the Divine, and died
Chief poet on the Tiber side,

"By grace of God! his face is stern,
As one compelled, in spite of scorn,
To teach a truth he could not learn."

Her verses are sometimes marred, also, by a harsh use of the adjective; as,

"Lo! in the depth of God's Divine,"

and,

"And the full sense of your mortal";

and also by forced rhymes of two syllables; as, for instance, the following stanza in a beautiful poem entitled "A Portrait":

"And if reader read the poem,
He would whisper — 'You have done a
Consecrated little Una.'"

Her learning also frequently obscures the sense of her poems; though the following example will show how gracefully this learning hangs about her when it is required:

"Soon ye read in solemn stories
Of the men of long ago —
Of the pale bewildering glories
Shining farther than we know, —
Of the heroes with the laurel,
Of the poets with the bay,
Of the two worlds' earnest quarrel
For their beauteous Helena, —
How Achilles at the portal
Of the tent, heard footsteps nigh,
And his strong heart, half immortal,
Met the *keïtai* with a cry, —
How Ulysses left the sunlight
For the pale eidola race,

Blank and passive through the dun light,
 Staring blindly on his face !
 How that true wife said to Pætus,
 With calm smile and wounded heart, —
 ‘ Sweet, it hurts not ! ’ — how Admetus
 Saw his blessed one depart ! —
 How king Arthur proved his mission, —
 And Sir Rowland wound his horn, —
 And at Sangreal’s moony vision
 Swords did bristle round like corn.”

The faults that have been spoken of are found mostly among Mrs. Browning’s earlier poems, yet even among these are some of high perfectness ; as, for instance, “ The Lay of the Brown Rosary.” Her later poems are in a great measure free from the same kind of blemishes. The versification of the “ Casa Guidi Windows ” is very clear and finished. Her last poem, “ Aurora Leigh,” contains some faults of a very different description ; which appear to be caused, to a great degree, by carelessness. The style is at times diffuse ; a fault, to which the freedom of blank verse can easily entice one of Mrs. Browning’s ardent temperament. It is difficult to conjecture at what epoch of the story the book purports to have been written. It does not seem to have been written in the form of a journal, while the events were taking place ; nor yet after the story was completed. It opens, indeed, as if this latter were the case. The heroine begins by saying,

“ I
 Will write my story for my better self ” ;

and the reader supposes that she had it all in her mind at that moment. When she says, therefore, in regard to Romney Leigh,

“ I attest
 The conscious skies and all their daily suns,
 I think I loved him not . . . nor then, nor since . .
 Nor ever,”

the reader believes it.

In the third book we find her sitting, a maiden lady and an authoress, reading letters and commenting upon them, in a manner that puts us very much in mind of Ruth Hall ; and the reader thinks that that is where the story must have left

her; and though it looks very much as if she were in love with her cousin, yet he must be mistaken about it. Notwithstanding all this, she says in the last book :

“ I love you, loved you . . . loved you first and last,
And love you on for ever. Now I know
I loved you always, Romney.”

This contradiction confuses the reader, and he feels almost as if he were trifled with.

Besides this confusion in the point of view from which the heroine regards the story she is telling, we find the same figures repeated, in a manner scarcely to be accounted for, except on the ground of carelessness. It is related that, when the works of Jean Paul were revised, it was found that, notwithstanding the abundance, we might almost say the superabundance, of figures with which they are crowded, scarcely one had been repeated. A similar examination of the “Aurora Leigh” would furnish a very different result; thus we read :

“ Sweet heaven, she takes me up
As if she had fingered me and *dog-eared* me
And spelled me by the fireside, half a life ! ”

This Aurora says of Lady Waldemar. We afterwards find Romney saying to Aurora :

“ You thought to have shut a tedious book
And farewell. Ah, you *dog-eared* such a page,
And here you find me.”

Other examples might be adduced of the same kind. So long as these are gathered from pleasing objects, or at least from objects that are not displeasing, they simply mar the artistic beauty of the work; but when they are taken from objects which excite our repugnance, this repetition becomes almost offensive. Thus one of Mrs. Browning's favorite figures is taken from the “*chin band*.” This expression suggests, not the repose of death, but its powerlessness and its ghastliness, and, if used at all, should be employed only when the strongest effects are to be produced.

Another peculiarity of the “Aurora Leigh” is suggested by the example just cited. Mrs. Browning seems, as some one has said, to have adopted some realistic theory in regard to art.

Thus she compares Romney, devoting his life to purposes of philanthropy, after his disappointment in love, to a man drowning a dog. Through the whole poem, truth of description is never yielded to taste, even though this truth may excite our loathing. Examples of this might be given, but it would be a thankless task to select from a work so full of beauty that which is fitted only to excite feelings of repulsion.

In the "Aurora Leigh," we find comparatively little of that obscurity which has prevented so many from enjoying the earlier poems of Mrs. Browning. The following lines, however, look as if she had studied Festus, to good or ill purpose, as the reader may decide.

" Shall I hope
To speak my poems in mysterious tune
With man and nature, — with the lava-lymph
That trickles from successive galaxies
Still drop by drop adown the finger of God,
In still new worlds? "

Directly after this occurs the following exquisite passage, made more beautiful by the contrast, like a flower on the edge of an Alpine glacier.

" With spring's delicious trouble in the ground
Tormented by the quickened blood of roots,
And softly pricked by golden crocus-sheaves
In token of the harvest-time of flowers."

While Mrs. Browning's poems, in spite, or in consequence, of her power of expression, are occasionally marred by harshness, obscurity, or carelessness, their internal structure is almost always perfect. The parts are so arranged, that the impression is deepened, and the interest increased, as we approach the close of each. Few, if any of them, close as if the writer stopped where she did out of mere caprice. We feel that the poem is finished, and that nothing can be added without marring it. The same peculiarity extends to the different stanzas of the same piece, when these are of any length. The whole thought bursts upon us in the last line, or else is re-stated in the last line, with a force and beauty which cannot be heightened. The following is a good example of this: —

“ We pray together at the kirk
 For mercy, mercy, solely —
 Hands weary with the evil work,
 We lift them to the Holy !
 The corpse is calm below our knee —
 Its spirit, bright before thee —
 Between them, worse than either, we —
 Without the rest or glory ! ”

As further examples of the same, we select the following :—

“ We sit together, with the skies,
 The steadfast skies, above us :
 We look into each other’s eyes, —
 ‘ And how long will you love us ? ’
 The eyes grew dim with prophecy,
 The voices, low and breathless —
 ‘ Till death us part ! ’ — O words, to be
 Our *best* for love the deathless !

“ We tremble by the harmless bed
 Of one loved and departed —
 Our tears drop on the lips that said
 Last night, ‘ Be stronger hearted ! ’
 O God, — to clasp those fingers close,
 And yet to feel so lonely ! —
 To see a light on dearest brows,
 Which is the daylight only ! ”

“ We sit on hills our childhood wist,
 Woods, hamlets, streams, beholding !
 The sun strikes, through the farthest mist,
 The city’s spire to golden.
 The city’s golden spire it was,
 When hope and health were strongest,
 But now it is the churchyard grass,
 We look upon the longest.”

We would not at all depreciate the value of verbal finish and perfectness in poetry. Compared, however, with perfection of internal structure, it must be admitted to be of far less importance. The latter shows the grasp and comprehension of the true artist, and is as much superior to the former, as a marred *torso* among the antiques in the Vatican is to the most polished piece of marble that ever left the chisel of Canova.

From the examples last given the transition to the sonnet

is easy ; for these specimens, except in the measure, possess the peculiarity and the beauty of the sonnet. This last-named species of composition, in which so many suffering writers and readers have toiled, appears to us to be Mrs. Browning's appropriate element. The limits, which repress the genius of others, only make her strength the more apparent. The care needful to the production prevents the faults of style into which she is apt to fall, and the nature of the sonnet displays to the fullest advantage that constructive power which we have seen to be her great excellence, so far as the outward form of her poetry is concerned. Indeed, we call to mind very few sonnets, written since the time of Milton, that may be compared with hers. The beauty of the sonnet is found in precisely her gradual evolution of the thought, which bursts upon us in its completeness, or in the fulness of its beauty, only in the last line. We will give two of Mrs. Browning's sonnets as specimens.

“PATIENCE TAUGHT BY NATURE.

“ ‘O dreary life!’ we cry, ‘O dreary life!’
And still the generations of the birds
Sing through our sighing, and the flocks and herds
Serenely live while we are keeping strife
With Heaven’s true purpose in us, as a knife
Against which we may struggle. Ocean girds
Unslackened the dry land, savannah-swards
Unweary sweep, hills watch, unworn ; and rife
Meek leaves drop yearly from the forest-trees,
To show above the unwasted stars that pass
In their old glory. O thou God of old !
Grant me some smaller grace than comes to *these*, —
But so much patience, as a blade of grass
Grows by contented through the heat and cold.”

“CHEERFULNESS TAUGHT BY REASON.

“I think we are too ready with complaint
In this fair world of God’s. Had we no hope
Indeed beyond the zenith and the slope
Of yon grey blank of sky, we might be faint
To muse upon eternity’s constraint
Round our aspirant souls. But since the scope
Must widen early, is it well to droop,
For a few days consumed in loss and taint ?

O pusillanimous Heart, be comforted, —
 And, like a cheerful traveller, take the road,
 Singing beside the hedge. What if the bread
 Be bitter in thy inn, and thou unshod
 To meet the flints? — at least it may be said,
 ‘Because the way is *short*, I thank thee, God!’ ”

From these remarks upon the outward form of Mrs. Browning's poems, we turn to consider that which forms their substance, that which is expressed, their *content*. This we shall find to be essentially different at the different periods of her life. In her earlier poems, that which seems to pervade them most intimately is the feeling of sorrow. We need scarcely introduce any examples of this. Either of those which have been cited already would answer the purpose; indeed, it would be scarcely possible to select any passage which does not bear more or less distinctly this impress. There are smiles, but they have a sadness about them, and cannot dry away suddenly the marks of tears. There are calls to cheerfulness and joy, but they are like the words of comfort which one weeping mourner breathes into the ear of another. But this sorrow is without weakness. The thought and learning which are united with the feeling, and made the medium of its expression, together with the self-command which pervades all, give, as has been well remarked, a certain statuesque beauty to her grief. Her mind, however, does not rest in this sorrow. It looks beyond, and longs for rest and joy, and amid its longings it sometimes half forgets to weep. This longing for rest is beautifully expressed in the poem entitled “The Sleep.”

“For me, my heart that erst did go
 Most like a tired child at a show,
 That sees through tears the jugglers leap, —
 Would now its wearied vision close,
 Would childlike on *His* love repose,
 Who giveth *His* beloved, sleep!”

Her longing for the joy which she feels the earth cannot afford, is strikingly expressed in the following words, which the mother seems to hear from the lips of her infant child, for whose life she has been ardently praying.

" O mother, mother ! loose thy prayer !
 Christ's name hath made it strong !
 It bindeth me, it holdeth me
 With its most loving cruelty,
 From floating my new soul along
 The blessed heavenly air !
 It bindeth me, it holdeth me
 In all this dark, upon this dull
 Low earth, by only weepers trod ! —
 It bindeth me, it holdeth me ! —
 Mine angel looketh sorrowful
 Upon the face of God."

This longing has its source in a deep and living faith. The writer appears always so surrounded by visions from the spiritual world, that they seem more real to her than the objects of sense. Thus she sings :

" As the moths around a taper,
 As the bees around a rose,
 As at sunset, many a vapor, —
 So the spirits group and close
 Round about a holy childhood, as if drinking its repose."

Above all, the consciousness of the Divine presence seems continually with her ; and, with earnest faith, she looks forward to the moment when this spiritual consciousness shall become actual vision, — to that moment of ecstasy called death. This feeling is nowhere more beautifully uttered than in the poem entitled " Cowper's Grave."

" Like a sick child that knoweth not his mother while she blesses,
 And drops upon his burning brow the coolness of her kisses ;
 That turns his fevered eyes around — ' My mother ! where's my mother ? ' —
 As if such tender words and looks could come from any other !

" The fever gone, with leaps of heart he sees her bending o'er him ;
 Her face all pale from watchful love, th' unweary love she bore him !
 Thus 'woke the poet from the dream his life's long fever gave him,
 Beneath those deep pathetic eyes which closed in death, to save him !

" Thus ? Oh, not *thus* ! No type of earth could image that awaking,
 Wherein he scarcely heard the chant of seraphs 'round him breaking —
 Or felt the new immortal throb of soul from body parted ;
 But felt *those eyes alone*, and knew ' *My Saviour ! not deserted !* ' "

This faith not only gives a firm foundation for her longing, but also glorifies even her sorrows.

“ Because my portion was assigned
Wholesome and bitter — Thou art kind,
And I am blessed to my mind.

“ Gifted for giving, I receive
The maythorn, and its scent outgive !
I grieve not that I once did grieve.

“ In my large joy of sight and touch
Beyond what others count for such,
I am content to suffer much.

“ *I know* — is all the mourner saith, —
Knowledge by suffering entereth ;
And life is perfected by Death ! ”

From this height of faith she utters oracles of consolation and good cheer.

“ Pray, pray, *thou* who also weepst,
And the drops will slacken so ; —
Weep, weep ! — and the watch thou keepest,
With a quicker count will go.
Think ! — the shadow on the dial
For the nature most undone,
Marks the passing of the trial,
Proves the presence of the sun !
Look, look up, in starry passion,
To the throne above the spheres, —
Learn ! the spirit’s gravitation
Still must differ from the tear’s.
Hope ! with all the strength thou usest
In embracing thy despair !
Love ! the earthly love thou lovest
Shall return to thee more fair.
Work ! make clear the forest-tangles
Of the wildest stranger-land ;
Trust ! the blessed deathly angels
Whisper, ‘ Sabbath hours at hand ! ’ ”

Such is the substance of Mrs. Browning’s earlier poems, — sorrow and longing, mediated by faith ; her sorrows becoming, through faith, the stepping-stones to that joy for which she longs. In the series entitled “ Casa Guidi Windows,” we find ourselves at a very different stage of experience. In the leading poems of this series, we have no more the utterances of sorrow and longing, nor even the clear voice of faith giving assurance of future joy. The joy is no longer

future, but has become present; instead of struggle, there is attainment. This difference is especially marked in the sonnets "From the Portuguese." There are, indeed, in the same series other poems which belong to the earlier period. Such is the one entitled "Human Life's Misery." These, if not all written during the earlier period, yet are the results of it; as the ocean casts up fragments of wrecks for days after the storm has ended. From the "Aurora Leigh" we learn indirectly that much of the restlessness and sadness expressed in the earlier poems was the result of that loneliness, which a woman feels when she has to meet unaided the storms of life. Her spirit needs some stronger spirit upon which to lean. A prose version of this we have in the life of Margaret Fuller Ossoli. The greater her genius, the more does she feel this need; for her very genius separates her from the common relations of life, and the more intense, therefore, is the demand for some one to walk with her through her lonely path, and the less is the likelihood that it will be satisfied. She must have one loftier and stronger than herself. A companion without companionship only increases the feeling of loneliness. If she have to stoop to the level of him who should aid her upward flight, the craving remains unfilled. She must have a spirit strong-winged as her own, that shall soar with her towards the sun, and support her when she is ready to sink back again to the earth. Such a feeling, as we may gather from Mrs. Browning's self-revelations, was, perhaps unconsciously, coloring her earlier poems, and, from the characteristics of her genius, it might have been supposed that it would remain unsatisfied. With her strength of intellect, her soaring imagination, her delicate spiritual perceptions, where could she find one whose strength should be greater, whose imagination loftier, and whose spirituality, if less delicate, should yet be no less strongly marked, and sturdier than her own? We know of but one poet of the present age whose character would correspond to the ideal which we have sketched, and that poet it was her good fortune to meet and to become united with. The genius of Robert and that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning stand, we might almost say, in the contrast of

male and female to each other. His is the stronger, the sterner, the more comprehensive; hers the more delicate, the more tender. Thus did Mrs. Browning's life become rounded to its completion. The sorrows had given way to gladness; the future joys for which she longed had become present; earth no longer served merely as a sad and dark passage to heaven, but was itself radiant with heaven's glorious light, and penetrated with the sweetness of its love. Thus she sings :

“ I lived with visions for my company
Instead of men and women, years ago,
And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
A sweeter music than they played to me.
But soon their trailing purple was not free
Of this world's dust,— their lutes did silent grow,
And I myself grew faint and blind below
Their vanishing eyes. Then THOU didst come . . to be,
Beloved, what they *seemed*. Their shining fronts,
Their songs, their splendors . . (better, yet the same, . .
As river-water hallowed into fountains . .)
Met in thee, and from out thee overcame
My soul with satisfaction of all wants,—
Because God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.”

And again :

“ As brighter ladies do not count it strange
For love to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near, sweet view of heaven for earth with thee.”

Having thus escaped from the struggles and darkness by which she had been surrounded, she looks upon the world as it really is. She sings of Italy as it lies before her, and describes in clear, ringing rhymes her hopes for it, and their disappointment.

Mrs. Browning has, however, not yet attained in these poems to her complete artistic development. Thus far she has sung of sorrow when she was sad, and of joy in her hours of happiness. She has not yet acquired that command of her material, by which, these emotions already passed, the days of weeping over, and the flush of joy faded into the common daylight, they may still be represented by her as truthfully as ever;— no longer in their antagonism

to each other, but united in a single work of art. As yet she

“ Cannot teach
Her hand to hold her spirit so far off
From herself.”

This is accomplished in the “Aurora Leigh.” Here her whole past life, with its many griefs and disappointments, with its aspirations and its failures, and with its final crown of love and joy, is placed before us. In it we have the substance of the earlier and that of the later poems, each of which had been before incomplete without the other, made the elements of a new and more perfect work, their union mediated by deeper views of art and of life than she had before expressed. We do not mean that it is, in the common sense of the word, an autobiography, like the earlier and the later sonnets. That which before had gushed directly from her heart is now treated as something entirely outside of herself. Yet so far as the spiritual development is concerned, it may be called an autobiography. It appears to express the complete development of the life of a woman and of an artist. The child of English and Italian birth begins her life in Italy. The lonely father does the best he can for her, and cradles her among the mountains, that the gentle influences of nature may supply, as far as possible, the want of a mother’s care. She says, he taught her what he had learned the best, “Grief and Love,” and we see that he cared for her with more than a mother’s tenderness, though without a mother’s gladness. So the unconscious childhood passed, and the child awoke

“To full life and its needs and agonies.
 His last word was ‘Love,’
 And none was left to love in all the world.”

Now comes the transition from the poetry of childhood to the prose of life, from Italy to England. Torn from every influence which had lent its aid to her earlier years, she was committed to the care of her father's sister, who lived

“ A harmless life, she called a virtuous life,
A quiet life, which was not life at all,
(But that she had not lived enough to know).”

This well-meaning kinswoman made the utmost effort to en-

graft her own prosaic nature upon the child, and to fashion her according to her own notion of a woman ; that is, she taught her to sit with her back to the window, that she might not see the trees, to read nice books upon womanhood, to brush "with extreme flounce the sciences," and if ever she caught her "soul agaze in her eyes," she knew how to bring it back to crochet, cross-stitch, or some other stupid task. Aurora seems to have been docile and compliant ; yet she found a way to let the sunshine and the lime-tree in ; she read the poets too when "the time was ripe," and while "the patient needle spilt the thread," she says she was not sad.

"My soul was singing at a work apart
Behind the wall of sense."

So her girlhood was fashioned, and the crisis came, on that June morning when she stood

"Woman and artist, — either incomplete."

She laid the poet's crown from off her brow to receive from her cousin Romney that offering of love, which we find afterwards she did not take too coldly. There was a conflict for her then, a sacrifice to be made ; she had the strength to choose the sterner part, and replaced the crown of ivy. So the two separated, and were left alone with their ideals. We follow their respective courses, and see how nobly they pursued them, how faithfully they always kept them pure above the dust, in all things striving for their fulfilment. We never have to tremble lest either will stoop too low ; we trust them through all perplexities, sure that each carries a consecrated aim. But when all is done, when each has found the desired success, disappointment comes with it. The work has been accomplished, the ideal has been embodied ; but the very success of their plans involves the most terrible failure of them. They do not gain satisfaction ; they only have opened before them a larger vision.

With this self-depression comes the true mutual recognition, when each beholds the other's purpose pure and high, when each sees the imperfection of the aim which has been pursued ; and though the June morning lost nothing of its nobleness, another morning rose to crown that day.

Let us now examine more closely the objects they sought, and the cause of their failure.

Romney was a mere reformer of the outward evils of society. He says of himself :

“ My soul is gray
 With poring over the long sum of ill ;
 So much for vice, so much for discontent,
 So much for the necessities of power,
 So much for the connivances of fear, —
 Coherent in statistical despairs,
 With such a total of distracted life, . .
 To see it down in figures on a page,
 Plain, silent, clear . . as God sees through the earth
 The sense of all the graves ! . . that ’s terrible
 For one who is not God, and cannot right
 The wrong he looks on.”

That there was hope in the future did not satisfy him.

“ Observe, — it had not much
 Consoled the race of mastodons to know
 Before they went to fossil, that anon
 Their place should quicken with the elephant ;
 They were not elephants but mastodons.”

He saw only the physical evils of life, and attempted to remedy them by physical means.

“ I beheld the world
 As one great famishing carnivorous mouth, —
 A huge, deserted, callow, black, bird Thing,
 With piteous open beak, that hurt my heart,
 Till down upon the filthy ground I dropped,
 And tore the violets up to get the worms.
 Worms, worms, was all my cry : an open mouth,
 A gross want, bread to fill it to the lips,
 No more ! ”

Romney established a phalanstery in his paternal hall on socialistic principles. Society tends more and more to become a mere machine ; the reformers seek too often to complete the process. But the individual makes himself felt more strongly for the constraint. It is too often thought, that men have naturally only the principle of love within them ; it is forgotten that the principle of hate is no less one of the original elements of the soul ; or rather, that principle of opposition and negation which, when stimulated, grows to hate. Thus every atom contains the twofold ele-

ment of attraction and repulsion; let the power of attraction have undue force for one moment, that of repulsion will make itself felt more powerfully in the next. Love and hate thus sleep together in the human breast; hate has the quicker senses of the two, and he who would make love must be careful not to move too harshly, or the sterner brother will start up before the gentler. Attraction or love is the principle which binds society together; the principle of repulsion is that by which the individual preserves his identity. Neither of these principles is to be sacrificed to the other. The surrender of our will must be a *voluntary* surrender; thus does the individual preserve his rights by the very act of yielding them. In the words of Tennyson, in the hymn with which the "In Memoriam" opens,

" Our wills are ours, we know not how ;
Our wills are ours, to make them thine."

This fact was overlooked by our reformer. He won the hate instead of the love of those he sought to save. With jeering shouts they burned his hall, and he himself was made blind among its ruins. Not only did he seek to distort the nature of others, but his own. Even his love he attempted to make merely a co-worker. He even endeavored to force it into still greater opposition to its true nature. He saw his error later, and exclaims :

" Distort our nature never, for our work,
Nor count our right hands stronger for being hoofs.
The man most man, with tenderest human hands,
Works best for men, — as God in Nazareth.

Fewer programmes; we who have no prescience.
Fewer systems; we who are held and do not hold.
Less mapping out of masses, to be saved,
By nations or by sexes. Fourier's void,
And Compté is dwarfed, — and Cabet, puerile.
Subsists no law of life outside of life;
No perfect manners, without Christian souls.
The Christ himself had been no Lawgiver,
Unless He had given the life, too, with the law."

He had felt that the world was to be renewed by his own labors alone, and, failing in his plans, he doubts of all things.

“ I was wrong,
 I ’ve sorely failed ; I ’ve slipped the ends of life,
 I yield ; you have conquered.”

This he says sadly to Aurora ; but she answers :

“ Stay,
 I ’ve something for your hearing also. I
 Have failed too.
 I ’ve surely failed, I know ; if failure means
 To look back sadly on work gladly done.”

She sees more clearly than he the great fault in all their plans. She says :

“ We both were wrong that June-day, — both as wrong
 As an east wind had been. I who talked of art,
 And you who grieved for all men’s griefs. . . what then ?
 We surely made too small a part for God
 In these things.”

In alternating speech they paint the true life. It is Aurora who speaks first :

“ ‘ The man, most man,
 Works best for men : and, if most man indeed,
 He gets his manhood plainest from his soul :
 While, obviously, this stringent soul itself
 Obeys our old rules of development ;
 The Spirit ever witnessing in ours,
 And Love, the soul of soul, within the soul,
 Evolving it sublimely. First, God’s love.’ ”

“ ‘ And next,’ he smiled, ‘ the love of wedded souls,
 Which still presents that mystery’s counterpart.
 Sweet shadow-rose, upon the water of life,
 Of such a mystic substance, Sharon gave
 A name to ! human, vital, fructuous rose,
 Whose calyx holds the multitude of leaves. —
 Loves filial, loves fraternal, neighbor-loves,
 And civic, . . all fair petals, all good scents,
 All reddened, sweetened from one central Heart ! ’ ”

We cannot follow further this closing scene, which glows with love and promise. They sit talking of the past and of the future, looking forward with a joyous faith, until the night has passed and the redness of the dawn gleams upon them. In the flaming jasper clouds is imaged the glory of which they speak. They stand together, hand in hand, their faces

turned towards the brightness of the morning; she, the singer, the representative of the spiritual life, gazing with her clear vision into the heavens, yet no longer spurning the worker by her side; he blinded in his struggle with vice and suffering, and wearied with his labors upon the earth, yet his face catching something of the glory of the coming day: the two, in their loving union, imaging the time when the singer and the worker, the spiritual and the blind material, having accomplished their separate missions, shall be blended into one. Thus they stand, and see the new heaven descending amid the clouds.

“ My Romney ! — Lifting up my hand in his,
As wheeled by Seeing spirits towards the east,
He turned instinctively, — where, faint and fair,
Along the tingling desert of the sky,
Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,
Were laid in jasper-stone as clear as glass
The first foundations of that new, near Day
Which should be builded out of heaven, to God.
He stood a moment with erected brows,
In silence, as a creature might, who gazed :
Stood calm, and fed his blind, majestic eyes
Upon the thought of perfect noon. And when
I saw his soul saw, — ‘ Jasper first,’ I said,
‘ And second, sapphire ; third, chalcedony ;
The rest in order, . . last, an amethyst.’ ”

Besides the relation in which the “ Aurora Leigh ” stands to the great question of life in general, it has a particular application to the questions which have been started in regard to the nature and position of woman. It is often thought that a large mental culture tends to unfit her for the more tender and domestic relations of life. Here is illustrated the reverse of this. Aurora and Romney could not meet in the highest union of love until they had each attained to the highest development of which they were separately capable. When this was accomplished, they became united in a love as much more noble than that of common lovers, as their individual development was more perfect than that of ordinary individuals. This view is entitled to great consideration, as coming from one who has herself passed through both stages, that of the lonely struggle and of the reward.

We perhaps owe some apology for having made reference occasionally in this article to matters entirely personal. They have had, however, too great an influence upon the poems themselves to be left out of the account. They are also alluded to freely in the works of both Mr. and Mrs. Browning, and all that has been said has been gathered from the works themselves.

We have thus considered Mrs. Browning's poems as consisting of Form and of Substance or *Content*; of Expression, and of that which is expressed. It remains very briefly to consider them as a whole, in which the opposition between these two elements is lost, and neither exists except in and through the other.

It is interesting to see the processes of history repeated in the individual, as to a certain extent they must be. The embryonic man passes through all the forms of lower life to attain to the higher. To our childhood the sun rose and sank, and the stars revolved about the seeming plane of the world, as they did to the ancients. Thus the development of the individual artist exhibits very often the three periods by which art attained to its present position. At first, when he awakes to spiritual truths, they loom about him, vast and shadowy. His mind cannot completely grasp them. It has itself no fixed stand-point from which to survey them. All is vague and unsettled. His life and the structure of his works will partake of this same character. They will be to a degree formless, and, so far as they seek to represent the higher spiritual truths, *symbolical*. This is the wild ferment that is seen, for instance, in the *Robbers* of Schiller, where we meet gigantic shadows instead of men. We find the same in the view of life exhibited in the *Sorrows of Werther*. This period, however, passes; the poet obtains a clearer view of truth, and consequently a more perfect command over the expression of it. The rudeness of the material yields to his labor, and answers to the beauty of his thought. The era thus reached is that corresponding to the one in which the classic art of the Greeks flourished. It would be easy to show, for instance, how the *Iphigenia* of Goethe differs from the Grecian drama; it would be no less easy to show that it resembles it

more nearly than most of his other writings. When the artist has acquired this perfect command of the material with which he has to work, if his intellectual and spiritual development continue, this latter begins to influence his productions more and more. The difficulties that he had met in the matter of outward form being subdued, this retires more and more into the background. He demands simply a medium for the communication of his thought, and no longer requires that this should reflect its beauty. The *Faust* of Goethe furnishes a fine example of the last-named class of works, in which the principle of modern or romantic art is first fully exhibited.

It is not our intention at present to examine the limits within which the foregoing remarks may be considered as applicable to the case in hand. They furnish at least the best point of view from which the works of Mrs. Browning can be regarded. Thus far we have studied the development of the external and internal elements of these poems, as if they were entirely distinct from each other. By uniting them, it will be seen how perfectly the three stages just described are exhibited in them. In the first period we found that the subject-matter was for the most part made up of sorrow, longing, and faith. The highest truths of religion and of the spiritual consciousness gathered about her, and these she strove to express. A yearning filled her soul to penetrate into those shadowy regions, which she felt were stretching around her. This very yearning implied that she had not yet reached the true centre of things, — the height from which one

“ Sees the world as one vast plain,
And one boundless reach of sky.”

These undefined longings, this restless yearning for something as yet unrealized, and consequently not yet understood, and this striving to image forth the spiritual phantasms which loom up dimly and loftily about her, mould the outward form of her poems. She has power enough over language to exhibit her thought clearly and gracefully; but so far as this thought is vague and shadowy, so far do her expressions become harsh and obscure. As the Egyptians reared the mighty

Pyramids, or hewed in rude proportions the gigantic Sphinx, with its twofold nature, so she piles together Greek and Hebrew, Grecisms, Hebraisms, and Germanisms, and the lore of all ages, to utter that which she feels the common modes of speech would fail to express. As the Hindoo twisted the ordinary forms of things into strange and uncouth shapes, to make them body forth that for which he and they had no adequate utterance, so she twists the forms of speech into unwonted expressions, and new relations, to satisfy a similar need. But in addition to this she adopts sometimes, for the same purpose, a wild and lofty symbolism, in whose mazes we are almost lost. Examples of this may be found in the "Drama of Exile" and in the "Vision of Poets." Even in her sonnets, which we have classed among her most nearly perfect works, she is careful to state how imperfectly that which she would say is uttered:—

"With stammering lips and insufficient sound,
I strive and struggle to deliver right
That music of my nature, day and night,
With dream and thought and feeling, interwound
And inly answering all the senses round
With octaves of a mystic depth and height,
Which step out grandly to the infinite
From the dark edges of the sensual ground!
This song of soul I struggle to outbear
Through portals of the sense, sublime and whole,
And utter all myself into the air:
But if I did it, — as the thunder-roll
Breaks its own cloud, — my flesh would perish there,
Before that dread apocalypse of soul."

And again:—

"O, the world is weak —
The effluence of each is false to all;
And what we best conceive, we fail to speak.
Wait, soul, until thine ashen garments fall!
And then resume thy broken strains, and seek
Fit peroration, without let or thrall."

At last the "ashen garments" do fall; these vague yearnings become satisfied; the sorrow that had striven for utterance passes away; the realities of earth replace the "visions" in which she has thus far lived; the inward conflict has be-

come changed to a joyous peace. Her poems exhibit this change in their outward form. What she has to say is distinctly before her, and is clearly and gracefully spoken. She has learned

“The whole of life
In a new rhythm,”

as she herself informs us. She sings her song of love. She gazes from the Windows of Casa Guidi, and describes the world as it is. At this period she seems herself to feel that she is nearer the Grecian stand-point than she has been before or is to be afterward; and she gives us a translation of the Prometheus of Æschylus full of strength and beauty.

Her spiritual growth, however, is not yet completed. Under genial influences it advances rapidly and healthfully. She has acquired a command of her own resources; her thought arises before her, grand and clear. She demands only a medium for its representation. She does not wander, as before, among symbols and types. She does not seek, on the other hand, that beauty of expression which marks her later sonnets and her Casa Guidi. It is enough for her that her thought is understood. If a figure suits her turn, no matter how often she may have used it before, it will serve just as well again. If an expression means just what she wants to say, no matter how revolting it may be. She cares as little about mere outward beauty, as did the early Christian painters. We thus understand the carelessness and the realism which we found to mark the “Aurora Leigh.”

We have considered the poems of Mrs. Browning as forming a connected whole. In our citations we have confined ourselves to those passages which have a bearing upon this general result. Had we stopped to gather flowers, we know not when our journey would have been ended. We have therefore hurried past much that is beautiful. Above all, the large eyes of Marian Earle, at once Madonna and Magdalene, look back sadly and half reproachfully upon us.

It remains to inquire what we have still to expect from a writer whose development has been hitherto so regular. Mrs. Browning's genius is lyric rather than dramatic. Her material is gathered principally from within. She tells us, in the

Preface to "Aurora Leigh," that the work contains her "highest convictions upon Life and Art." She has passed through the three periods which represent those of the development of Art. She has embodied the results of this process in a noble work which we think will continue to be her finest. That she will still refresh and inspire us with her song, we cannot doubt. As the art of the present age can at will make use of all the forms which originally answered to a particular epoch of history; so Mrs. Browning can reproduce for us, to a certain degree, the various stages through which she has thus far passed. These results will, however, probably stand in the same relation to the "Aurora Leigh," which Tennyson's "Maud" bears to his "In Memoriam."

Although, as we have said, Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh" is her finest work, there are many among her admirers whom her earlier poems will still move the most deeply. Comparatively few can follow, with full sympathy, her entire course. Perhaps most of those whose spiritual life has actually begun, stand yet upon the stage of sorrow and longing. While such gaze with admiration on the shining path of their poet, they will yet feel the deepest sympathy with her, as she is still walking among the shadows, and cheering them with her songs. It appears to us, also, that the "Aurora Leigh" is not to be reckoned among the works destined for immortality. The universal element in it is too much mingled with the peculiarities of our time, to admit of its becoming naturalized in another age. This need not, however, lessen our enjoyment of it; as we should not find the blossom of the century-plant less beautiful for the thought that the entire age had been needed for its production, and that it yet would wither, very shortly, before our eyes.